

Message from Interim Commissioner Nancy Navarretta



I wanted to be sure to take a moment amidst all of the hustle and bustle of the season to wish you and yours happy and safe holidays. Many of us take this time to enjoy time-honored traditions with loved ones, something that has obviously been affected by the ongoing pandemic. While many revel in the pageantry and joy of the holiday season, for some it can bring with it some associated stress. Taking a few minutes every day to practice gratitude can have a positive and long-lasting impact on your mental health. Research has also shown that “by consciously practicing gratitude, we can train the brain to attend selectively to positive emotions and thoughts, thus reducing anxiety and feelings of apprehension.” The simple act of reminding yourself of the positive things in your life – even as simple as the roof over your head or food on your plate – can invoke feelings of thankfulness and optimism that make managing stress, depression or anxiety easier.

If you’re not sure where to start or how to practice gratitude every day, try these simple exercises:

- Try to appreciate everything. This includes not only the big and obvious, but also the small. Recognize the good in every part of your day.
- Find gratitude in your challenges. It can be hard to feel thankful when faced with a stressful situation, but taking the time to find gratitude and optimism during your difficult times can make managing them easier.
- Keep a gratitude journal. Take a few minutes at the end of each day to think about what you are grateful for and write them down. This can be anywhere from one thing to many, and will help you develop a habit of recognizing the good from each day.
- Volunteer in your community. Research shows that volunteering is helpful in improving mental and physical health, including increased life satisfaction and happiness, and lower depressive symptoms, stress and anxiety.
- Spend time with loved ones. Spending time with loved ones can help you recognize things to be grateful for and evoke feelings of happiness and love.

As I reflect upon the recent happenings detailed in this newsletter, I feel grateful that I am able to work with a group of dedicated professionals who provide service and support that fosters dignity, respect, and self-sufficiency in those we serve every day.

Self-care can be an important tool to manage mental health challenges during stressful times. As part of your holiday wellness practice, I urge everyone to take a moment and reflect upon the things you are thankful for, big and small.

Mental Health and the Holidays

The holiday season is a time of year for social activities, holiday shopping, and quality time with loved ones. Unfortunately, COVID-19 and its variants continue to make those activities more difficult. Keeping up with activities, staying positive and staying connected to supports can be overwhelming. For those facing mental health or substance use challenges, the holiday season becomes an even more difficult time. Regardless of whether you are living with a mental health challenge or know someone who is, you can take steps to prepare for the holidays and prioritize your mental health in the coming weeks. Use these tips to get started.

(*adapted from the National Council for Mental Wellbeing's "Mental Health During the Holidays: Five Tips to Ease the Struggle")

Manage your expectations.

This year may not feel like the holiday season we are used to. Give yourself and those around you some grace –we're all trying to balance staying safe with feeling "normal."

Pull back when you need to.

If at any point you feel overwhelmed or anxious, know that it's perfectly fine to take a step back. Healthy boundaries are necessary for your mental health.

Reach out to loved ones.

Stay connected with your loved ones via text, social media, video or phone. Offer your support to loved ones who may be struggling. Sometimes, a simple text or email can make a difference.

Monitor your moods.

The "holiday blues" are real, so it is important to stay in tune with how you're feeling. Practicing mindfulness, journaling, or even rating how you feel every day can help you better understand your emotions. Pay attention to what makes you happy and incorporate it into your daily life.

Ask for help.

If the holidays become more than you can handle, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help. Talk to a loved one, trusted peer, or even your physician about how you're feeling. If you notice a family member or loved one having a difficult time, encourage them to seek help too.

Governor Lamont Nominates Nancy Navarretta as Mental Health and Addiction Services Commissioner

Having served as the department's deputy commissioner since 2015, she had been serving as its acting commissioner for the last several months. Gov. Lamont explained that her effective leadership during this transition period has been so impressive that he asked her to permanently stay in the position.

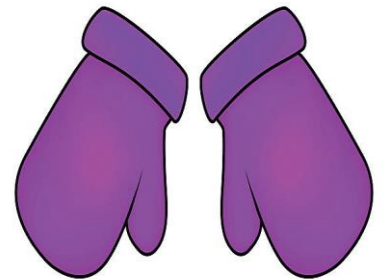


NEW DMHAS Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

The DMHAS Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is the Racial Justice, Multicultural Relations and Equal Opportunity Branch of the DMHAS Office of the Commissioner (OOC). The DEI Division is committed to leading and supporting initiatives that foster a welcoming, respectful, and inclusive environment for all staff and clients.

Reliance Health Recovery Coach Program and the Norwich Police Department collaboration receives Social Service Recognition Award

This calendar year alone, this partnership has worked with over 150 individuals struggling with substance use disorder (primarily opioids), helping to reduce the overdose death rate by 15-20% and increase the Norwich overdose survival rate to an astounding 82% (an increase of nearly 19% from 2020).



Uprooting Addiction

Uprooting Addiction is an urgent look at the national drug addiction crisis that is ravaging local communities across the U.S., including the filmmakers' own in Northwest Connecticut. It is a mosaic-like portrait of a single community coming together to take on one of the most critical challenges of our times. We have made this important film available to view free for a limited time. [Click here to watch.](#)

A gratitude challenge can be a quick and effective way to become more grateful in your everyday life. Being more grateful is not always easy--it might not come naturally to you, or you may just be stuck in a rut right now, yet you want to focus on the good around you. Either way, this 4-day challenge is a great way to kick start your gratitude practice.

4 Day Gratitude Challenge

01

Journal 3 things you're grateful for

02

Make a list of your accomplishments

03

Celebrate how far you've come

04

Donate things you no longer need

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